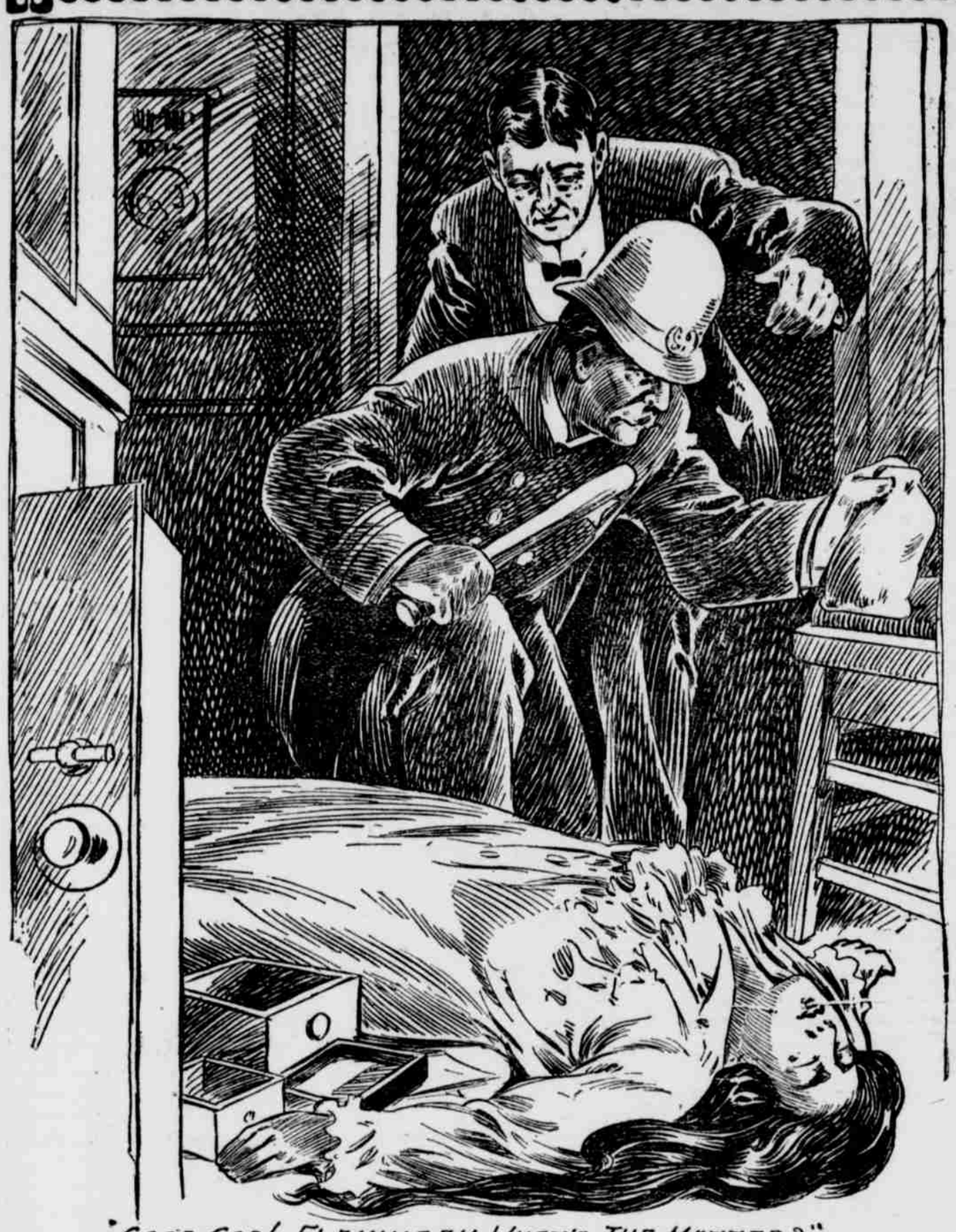
Tale of the Black Bag

By Dr. George F. Butler and Herbert Ilsley

Dr. Furnivall Cracks Hardest Nut in Criminal Annals

Ingenuity of English "Con" Men and Its Result—Story with Mysterious Opening Tells of Suspected Robbery in Room in Hotel Versailles—Ultimate Consequences of Woman's Fear That Burglar Was Ransacking Room—Famous Physician-Detective Arrives at a Solution in Quick Order.



"GOOD GOD! FLANNIGAN, WHAT'S THE MATTER?"

AT three o'clock in the morning the clerk at the small and select Hotel Versailles, busy with his books, paused suddenly with his pen poised and gazed toward the staircase, where he heard something that sounded like a rapid pat of feet on the soft carpet. Instantly around the corner of the landing appeared a figure in white, coming down two steps at a leap.

"Good Lord!" the startled clerk gasped, and stopped from sheer inability to utter another word. He had recognized one of the house's most beautiful and honored guests in the flying shape, Miss Thorndyke of London, and she was garbed solely in a spotless white robe de nuit!

Miss Thorndyke flew across the cold marble of the office floor, her naked feet twinkling, her garment fluttering, and with staring eyes and finger to lip beckoned the bewildered clerk.

"There's a man in my room, Mr. Bray!" she whispered excitedly. "I have locked him in, but he doesn't know it—hurry—quick—"

She gave a quick exclamation and seized the clerk's arm spasmodically as a scream floated out suddenly on the air, seeming in the solemn night silence to fill the whole building, so that it was impossible to judge from what direction it came. The clerk, bewildered, not knowing which way to turn, stood looking helplessly this way and that while the girl clung to his arm, white and speechless with fright.

The sudden opening of a nearby door, as a startled guest poked his head out, roused the clerk from his stupor, and wrenching his arm free from the girl's frantic grasp he sprang along the hall and down the stairs to the office. Here, he saw, to the demolishment of what shreds of sanity had remained to him, another woman in night attire, stretched on the floor, and over her recumbent body stood the burly form of a policeman with his night-stick drawn.

"Good God! Flannigan, what's the matter?" he managed to gasp.

The officer motioned to him to shut the street door against the curious eyes of any chance passerby. Then he held toward the clerk a black bag, made of fine broadcloth, with a drawstring around the neck.

"Do you know what is in this?" he said in a low tone.

"Mme. Selba's diamonds," he said, thickly, like a drunken man. A misty notion of what perhaps had nearly happened drained the strength from his body. Snatching the bag from the officer's hand he examined the contents feverishly. There were 14 leathern boxes, of varying shapes and sizes, locked and sealed by means of a strip of gummed paper with his own name on each of them, just as he had written it some hours before when he took charge of the bag. The blood returned to his cheeks, and with a sigh of relief from his very heart he placed the bag in the safe without examining it any further, and closing the door attempted to turn the handle. But the bolt refused to work.

"She was monkeying with it," whispered the policeman. "I seen her through the back winder, and I hit it for the front entrance for all I was worth, and caught her doing the sneak act with the bag. When I grabbed her she screeched for fair and buckled over on the floor. But say! who is she? By the rig she is sporting she must belong to the house, for she couldn't come far in it—"

"It is Mrs. Van Dyke, one of our best guests," said the clerk as soon as he could secure a good look at the unconscious woman's features. "I don't understand it at all," he added helplessly, "and I don't know what to do—"

Out from among the four or five guests who had been attracted to the spot by the commotion a physician stepped at this moment, and after bending over the body a moment, said to the clerk:

"She is in a hypnotic trance. Have her taken to her rooms at once. Do you know what doctor she has?"

"She does not believe in medicine, and has no doctor," responded the clerk.

"Then I will attend to her for the moment, for she must be brought out of this coma," said the physician. "Send to my rooms and ask my wife for some amly nitrite, and I'll see Mrs. Van Dyke through."

At this moment the husband of the unconscious lady, insufficiently clothed and wild with excitement, came bounding down the stairs.

The lady gave a deep sigh.

"Tell me, Evalina," said Mr. Van Dyke, tenderly. He gently drew the fingers away. "It is I, dear. You are safe now; don't feel afraid any longer. Tell me what you mean. Of what man do you speak? What has he done? Why were you out of bed at three o'clock in the morning, and what has happened? Can't you speak and tell me, dear?"

With evident effort she succeeded in restraining the hysteria on the verge of which the symptoms showed her nerves to be tottering, and answered in a low voice:

"It is Mr. Wrinkle. You know that in the first place he hypnotized me and so cured my dreadful headaches. Of course I was grateful and sometimes allowed him to experiment on me in his classes, so that his pupils could obtain a practical knowledge of his methods. Being highly interested in hypnotism I was very glad to secure all the insight into it that I could, and so I went frequently to see Mr. Wrinkle. He told me I was his best subject, saying jokingly that it was a great pity I was so very rich, for if I had been poor he would have given me a good salary to act regularly as his subject, and together we should make wonderful discoveries in the realm of mind. He gave me telepathic messages while I was wide awake and at a distance from him, and I received them as strongly as if I were in the room with him. He would command me mentally to do this or that, and I hadn't it in my power to resist. I always carried out his instructions, even against my will. I could not help doing as he demanded. I could not rest, either, until I had done so, after once receiving his messages. His commands were always harmless and amusing little things until this last one came, and we had great fun over them. But this morning I awoke suddenly to hear his mental voice repeating this suggestion:

"'Exactly at three o'clock I wish you to rise, go down stairs to your hotel office, open the door of the safe, which you will find unlocked, take from it a black bag, carry the bag to your parlor and drop it out of the front window. When you have done this return to your bed, go to sleep and forget the whole incident.'

"This was the message, which he repeated several times, until I had the words by heart. Then he stopped and I remember nothing more. But I have a vague consciousness of having done something dreadful—what it can be I don't—"

The last words came in a weak whisper, and as she uttered them she fainted in her husband's arms.

"Dr. Furnivall, I am in great trouble, and I have called to see if I can enlist your sympathies in my behalf.

"I wish to keep my name a secret for the moment in order to—er—to, you know—er—to test—test—"

He paused again in embarrassment Dr. Furnivall completed the sentence for him.

"Yes," said Dr. Furnivall, with great dryness of tone.

"How much so you shall judge. Listen. You were born in Kennebunk, Me., 37 years ago, the 9th day of last April. You studied for the Christian ministry, were taken sick and never finished your college course, went to California for the climate, sold life insurance in San Francisco, became engaged to a girl who jilted you for a famous featherweight pugilist, which made you a woman-hater for two months, or until your interest became awakened by psychology. This you studied under a poor teacher, who had himself entered only the outskirts of the telepathic city, and, taking up mental healing, came to this town, met a woman who proved to be the best subject you ever had, as you thought for a time, but of whom now you don't know what to think, for she has charged you wantonly with a crime which it is not in your nature to commit, and you are come here to-day to ask my assistance in freeing you of the charge. And your name is—is—let's see, R—R—no, not the letter R, but the sound R—Wrinkle. Your name is William W. Wrinkle!"

Dr. Furnivall sighed as if with relief over the accomplishment of a Titanic task and sat back in his chair.

"Now," Dr. Furnivall went on, "I am going to clear you of this charge—on one condition."

For an instant the hypnotist remained as if he had not heard. Then he raised his eyes, with inquiry in them, to the doctor's.

"The condition is, that you give me your promise to refrain from attempting to practice hypnotism until you feel assured that you know what you are about. You'll know when you have arrived at this state of knowledge, if you ever do arrive—don't worry about that. You will entertain no doubt about it whatever. Do you promise—the fulfillment to rest contingent on my clearing you?"

"Yes," he said, huskily, and dropped his eyes again to the floor.

The hypnotist looked at him undeterminedly, as if he wished to ask the real reason, but did not dare do so. He did not understand Dr. Furnivall's smile, which had in it a touch of the cryptic and occult.

"At all events," he finally screwed up his courage to say, "it is impossible to suspect this gentlewoman of any wanton misdoing. She is very rich, very high-minded, a lovely character, of an old family—"

"Come!" Dr. Furnivall interrupted, giving this man's estimate of character and conditions as much attention as he would the chattering of a monkey. "I am interested to know just how the scheme was worked and what part that lovely young English girl played in it. It was she who lured the clerk from the office, leaving the safe unguarded. In fact, there are several little items in this case that excite my thirst for knowledge. Come!"

"But, I have been hiding; they will recognize me, arrest me—"

"I'll take care of you—come!" said Dr. Furnivall, and Wrinkle meekly obeyed.

At Station 16 Dr. Furnivall picked up two policemen, whom he took with him to the hotel. There the landlord, after a few words that startled him a good deal had been spoken in his ear by Dr. Furnivall, immediately showed the party to the suite occupied by the rich and exclusive Van Dykes. The husband and wife were alone together, and while the officers drew themselves up, one on each side of the door, Dr. Furnivall removed his spectacles and advanced to the lady, who sat by the window, with a book in her hand.

"Madam," he said, "be good enough to look at me!"

She was a tall blonde with a beautiful skin of red and white, a willowy form, luscious lips, and blue eyes that were incomparably lovely and melting and tender. She beamed up at him with a smile that would capture the heart of almost any man except the one she was bestowing it on at the moment. He stood with one hand in his pocket, and easily repeated the command:

"Mrs. Van Dyke, tell me in as few words as possible, who you are and what you know about the attempted theft of Mme. Selba's diamonds."

In a colorless voice, she answered at once:

"Our name is Seely, not Van Dyke. We pretended to belong to that old family for social reasons. We are adventurers. My husband and I have followed this singer three months waiting for an opportunity to appropriate her diamonds, which, we discovered, she always left in charge of the hotel wherever she was stopping, on returning from the theater. At this small hotel there is but one night-clerk, and the last bell-boy goes to bed at two o'clock in the morning. We studied to get this clerk out of the way for a few minutes, leaving the safe unlocked, and it must be after the bell-boy had gone. My husband learned the make of the safe, examined those like it at the salesrooms, had a small piece of iron made to fit into the bolt-socket, and last evening managed to spike the safe in the face and eyes of the clerk—an easy matter, for he used to be a professional sleight-of-hand performer. We had become acquainted with the Thorndikes at the table, and knew that the daughter would not dare to waken her mother by screaming, for she has a serious heart trouble and the physician has warned them against startling her in any way, so that if the daughter could be made to believe there was somebody in her room she would be likely to run to the clerk, who would probably start so hastily for the scene that he would not give much attention to the condition of the safe.

"We had secured a room just under Miss Thorndike's, and at three o'clock this morning my husband, through a long tube of tin, made on the telescope pattern, which he thrust up to her open window, imitated certain noises, as if a man were stumbling around in the dark. This awakened her, and she did as we had studied it out that she would do—she ran for the office. And while the clerk was absent from his place I hastened down and secured the black bag containing the diamonds. But a policeman, who, as we have since learned, was in the habit of coming to the back door for a dram which was furnished him every morning at just that time by the night-clerk, saw me at the safe and—"

"Yes, but please tell me what Mr Wrinkle had to do with all this?"

"Mr. Wrinkle was the provision we made for my escape from conviction in case I should be caught in the risky venture. I posed before him and his pupils as a completely helpless hypnotic subject in his hands, taking great care that he and they should become convinced that his mind dominated me wholly, even at a distance. Then if our plan should fail in any way, and I should be apprehended, I could pretend to be in a hypnotic trance, produced by him, and acting under his direction, with no responsibility of my own. I had many witnesses, his pupils, to prove that he could command me in this way. Then he, not I, would be convicted!"

The authors of this ingenious scheme were found to be two noted English confidence workers, wanted in London on so many serious charges that, being sent back there by the United States authorities, they were each of them given sentences that meant practically for life.

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All Who Would Enjoy

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